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UNCLAS TEGUCIGALPA 001593

SIPDIS

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SUBJECT: DEMOCRACY AND DYNASTIES: THE SAGA OF HONDURAN POLITICAL FAMILIES IN THE LIBERAL PARTY

REF: TEGUCIGALPA 1174

**¶1.** SUMMARY: The politics of Honduras have been dominated by a group of dynasties that have controlled the politics in the country for decades. Local press coverage has recently focused on the younger potential politicians in those dynasties. There are no laws prohibiting children of current or former high officials from running for office or holding appointed positions and many, especially these children, feel it would be wrong and undemocratic to deny people the right to be politically active just because of their familial connections to past politicians. It is debatable whether or not this new generation of politicians is worthy of the public's vote or if they are riding the coattails of their prominent family members to get elected to their positions.  
END SUMMARY.

**¶2.** There is a new generation of young politicians in Honduras, whose parents and other family members have held high political positions in the past. The prominent Flores, Reina, Pineda, and Azcona families have dominated the Liberal Party political scene in Honduras for some time. Political dynasties have turned the two major parties, the National and Liberal Parties, into "family property." There are more family ties in the Liberal Party (LP) than in the National Party (NP). The increased presence of young people in politics and parties, specifically the LP, may be an effort to increase support in this year's elections.

**¶3.** Progeny of political dynasties currently hold several elected and appointed positions in the Liberal Party (see reftel). Mary Elizabeth "Lizzi" Flores Flake, daughter of former President Carlos Flores, is currently the Secretary of Youth Affairs of the Executive Council of the LP and the top congressional candidate on the LP ticket for the department that includes Tegucigalpa. Jose Simon Azcona Bocock, nicknamed "Azconita", is a Tegucigalpa city councilman and the son of former president Jose Azcona. He follows Flores as the number two congressional candidate on the LP ticket for the department that includes Tegucigalpa. Octavio Pineda Espinoza, son of the former presidential candidate Rafael Pineda Ponce is on the Executive Central Council of the LP and was elected to a congressional position in 2001. He lost in the February primaries and will not be running for reelection to Congress.

**¶4.** Critics argue that many of these young people lack the political know how and time in the political arena to have gained their high positions through merit. Many attribute Azconita's success to favorable TV coverage and Octavio Pineda's win to his being the son of Pineda Ponce. On the other hand, these "political heirs" believe the critics are unjustly questioning their positions, either because they are looking for a story or because the critics are envious. In the opinion of Azconita "In most cases, the criticism is unjust; most children of political figures have earned their positions through genuine knowing and touching the minds and hearts of the Honduran people, like any activist." Others contend that their prominent family members are no longer politically active and, therefore, their relationships do not figure into elections and appointments.

**¶5.** Comment: While some of the new generation of politicians have honestly earned their top positions, many have not. Often their positions have been handed to them by family members. This system of cronyism is a part of the reason why Honduras has such a debilitating corruption problem. Family members, close friends, and associates are given top positions without a thought to their qualifications and integrity. Ironically, Flores and Azcona, despite being political legacies, are very popular and have given a youthful face to a party in which the older generation was largely defeated by LP presidential nominee Mel Zelaya and his congressional slate (including Flores and Azcona) in the February primaries. End Comment.  
Tuebner